Slim Woman

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Harvey Leake

Prescott, AZ
2017

Mary Louisa Wade was born on September 2, 1877, in the small mining town of Ward City, Nevada. Her father was John James "Jack" Wade, born in 1846 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Her mother, Julia Frances Rush, was born in 1859 in Barnham, Texas. Jack died on September 2, 1925--Louisa's 48th birthday--in Kayenta.

Louisa was the second of five children with three brothers and one sister. When she was two years old, the family moved to Mancos in southwestern Colorado. There she grew up.

One of Jack's sisters was Mary Virginia, known as Jennie. She was the only woman killed in the Battle of Gettysburg when a stray bullet struck her in her sister's home.

The Wade Family, with Louisa at top right

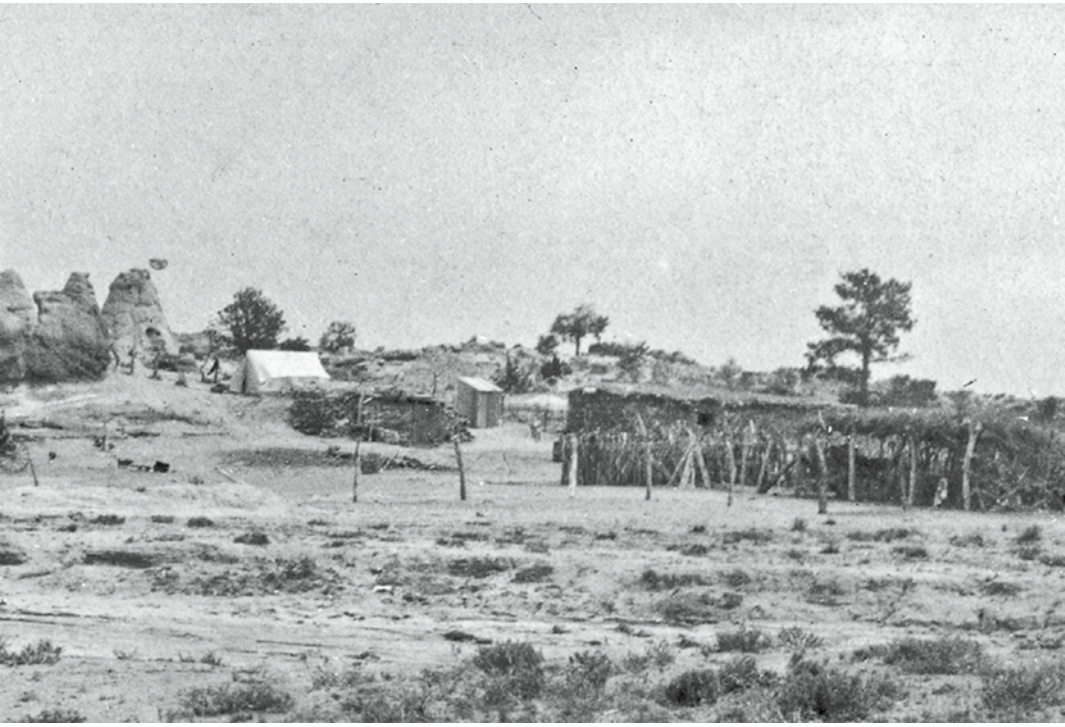
Louisa married John Wetherill, a rancher, explorer, and backcountry guide, in Mancos on March 17, 1896.

John and Louisa Wetherill, c.1913

Louisa and John had two children. Benjamin Wade was born on December 28, 1896, and Georgia Ida "Sister" was born on January 12, 1898.

In 1901 John and Louisa left the family ranch at Mancos and moved to northwestern New Mexico, the badlands. They were to run the trading post at Ojo Alamo. It was their first true introduction to Navajos. "New Mexico looked barren and forbidding, and our new neighbors were hard to understand," Louisa later wrote. In the next few years they also ran stores at Chavez and Chaco Canyon, New Mexico.

Louisa grew more and more curious about the Navajo and "wanted to go where the Indians still lived in their old ways." Therefore, they moved to Oljato (Moonlight Water), Utah, in 1906. They chose a place for a new trading post there, which many Navajo men helped them to build. One of those men was Wolfkiller. Louisa became known to her Navajo frineds as Asthon Sosi—The Slim Woman.



Wolfkiller worked at the trading post with them, telling Louisa stories nearly every day. He asked that she record the stories "to help the younger people along their way."

Louisa spent the remainder of her life living among and advocating for the Navajo. She became close friends with many of her neighbors.

Beyond Monumental valley is Oljato (Moonlight Water), where Wetherill & Colville have a trading post. Here one family of white people live in the midst of the Navajo nation, 150 miles from the nearest railroad point. Nevertheless they are people of education and culture, speak the Navajo language fluently, are much interested in the welfare of the Indians and are doing an excellent work among them. Mrs. John Wetherill is undoubtedly the best Navajo scholar living. She has the entire confidence of the Indian and will be able to do a great service to the scientific world in gathering data which will give a knowledge of this people.

—Byron Cummings, 1908

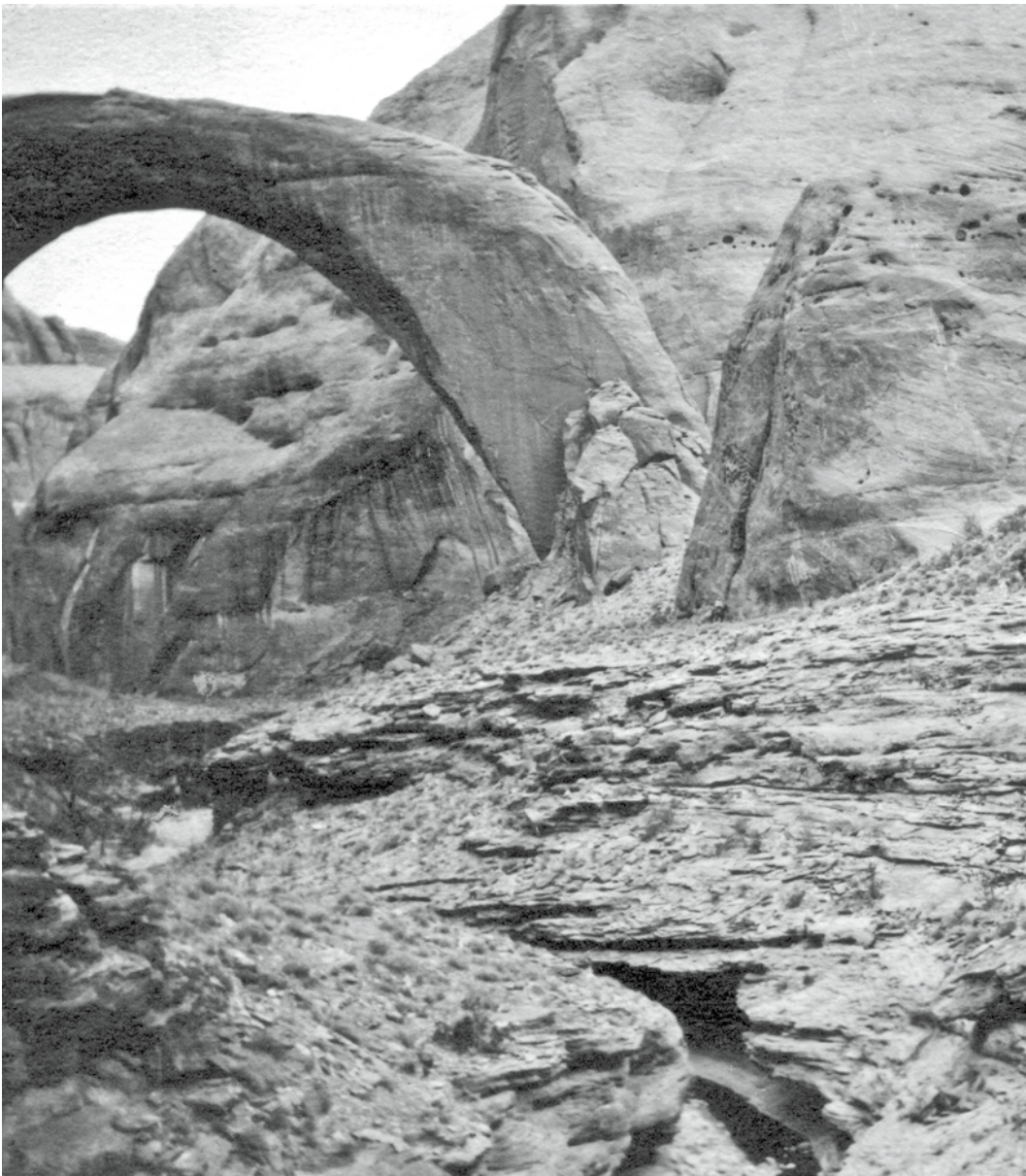
The facts set forth in this narrative were obtained from Indians with the assistance of the late Mrs. John Wetherill, who often acted as interpreter for us in those early days of exploration on the Navajo reservation. She was much respected by Hoskinini. He used to insist that she was a Navajo girl who, when a child, was stolen by a group of white people crossing the reservation on their trek to California. He contended Mrs. Wetherill could not understand and speak their language so fluently or be so sympathetic with their customs and so helpful to them in all their difficulties if she were not a Navajo by blood.

Hoskinini adopted her into his clan, the Tachini, and before his death requested that all his personal possessions be taken to Oljato, the Wetherill trading post, so that Mrs. Wetherill could distribute them among his family. I well remember that occasion, and was surprised to see the confidence in which she was held. She seemed a judge and administratrix whose word was accepted without question. In the opinion of his relatives, anyone commended by Hoskinini was to be trusted absolutely.

—Byron Cummings, 1909

Hoskininni, c.1909

To Mrs. Wetherill, the only white woman in the region, much of the success of the expedition was due. She is a very storehouse of Navajo traditions. She is their confidante. It was she who first learned of the Nonnezhoshi arch from the Navajos. Not an event happens, scarcely a sparrow falls near Oljato, but she is forthwith informed of it. Their language is to her as her mother tongue, and so great is the esteem in which they hold her, that they have adopted her into their



tribe, a distinction never before enjoyed by any white woman. And she is worthy of it all. Without the good will and the assistance of the Wetherills archaeological studies in northern Arizona would be exceedingly difficult, for their influence over the Navajo is supreme. Fortunately, the Utah expedition had it.

—Stuart Young, 1909

Nonnezhoshi arch (Rainbow Bridge)

In 1910 the Wetherills left Oljato and moved south 30 miles into Arizona where they established a new trading post and lodge at a place they called Kayenta. There, for the next thirty-five years, they lived among their Navajo friends and provided a place of inspiration for innumerable guests.

Sister, Louisa, John, and Ben Wetherill
courtesy of Arizona State Historical Society

...Mrs. Wetherill is doing, and striving to do, much more than Horace Greeley held up as an ideal. One of her hopes is to establish a 'model hogan,' an Indian home, both advanced and possible for the Navajos now to live up to—a half-way house in which, for instance, the Indian girl will be taught to wash in a tub with a pail of water heated at the fire; it is utterly useless to teach her to wash in a laundry with steam and cement bath-tubs and expect her to apply this knowledge on a reservation. I wish some admirer of Horace Greeley and friend of the Indian would help Mrs. Wetherill establish her half-way house.

Mrs. Wetherill was not only versed in archaeological lore concerning ruins and the like, she was also versed in the yet stranger and more interesting archaeology of the Indian's own mind and soul.... If Mrs. Wetherill could be persuaded to write on the mythology of the Navajos, and also on their present-day psychology—by which

The Kayenta trading post

somewhat magniloquent term I mean their present ways and habits of thought—she would render an invaluable service. She not only knows their language; she knows their minds; she has the keenest sympathy not only with their bodily needs, but with their mental and spiritual processes; and she is not in the least afraid of them or sentimental about them when they do wrong. They trust her so fully that they will speak to her without reserve about those intimate things of the soul which they will never even hint at if they suspect want of sympathy or fear ridicule. She has collected some absorbingly interesting reproductions of the Navajo sand drawings, picture representations of the old mythological tales; they would be almost worthless unless she wrote out the interpretation, told her by the medicine-man, for the hieroglyphics themselves would be meaningless without such translation....

—Theodore Roosevelt, 1913

The person who seems to be influencing the life of Navajos most is Mrs. John Wetherill of the Kayenta trading post, Arizona. This cultured woman wields more power among them than any chief, or 'head man.' She is a white woman adopted into the tribe and is a real leader among them, holding her position as a recognition by the Indians of her sympathetic interest in their life. A queen could hardly be more loved by her subjects. She is at once the judge, physician, interpreter, adviser and best friend of her devoted wards. She knows their language perfectly and has so aided them in modifying many of their festivals and ceremonies as to rid them of the more gruesome and cruel features. She has even been able to exercise an uplifting influence on their marriage and divorce customs, which has not been easy, for they have long been accustomed to trial marriages, changing their wives or increasing their numbers as often as they were inclined without restriction.

—Joseph F. Anderson, 1913

Slim Woman, c.1915

...Mrs. Wetherell, who possesses an almost uncanny understanding and sympathy for the Navajo that make her a more trustworthy Indian student than many an ethnologist learned in the past, but little versed in Indian nature. She speaks their tongue like a native, and has their confidence as they seldom give it to any of the white race. They have entrusted to her secrets of their tribe, and because she keeps their secrets, they reveal others to her.

When the "flu " swept across the desert, it was particularly virulent among the Southwest Indians.... Mrs. Wetherell and her family hardly slept, but rode back and forth through the reservation, nursing, substituting disinfectants and fresh air for "medicine," took filthy and dying patients to her own home till it became a hospital, and prepared the dead for burial....

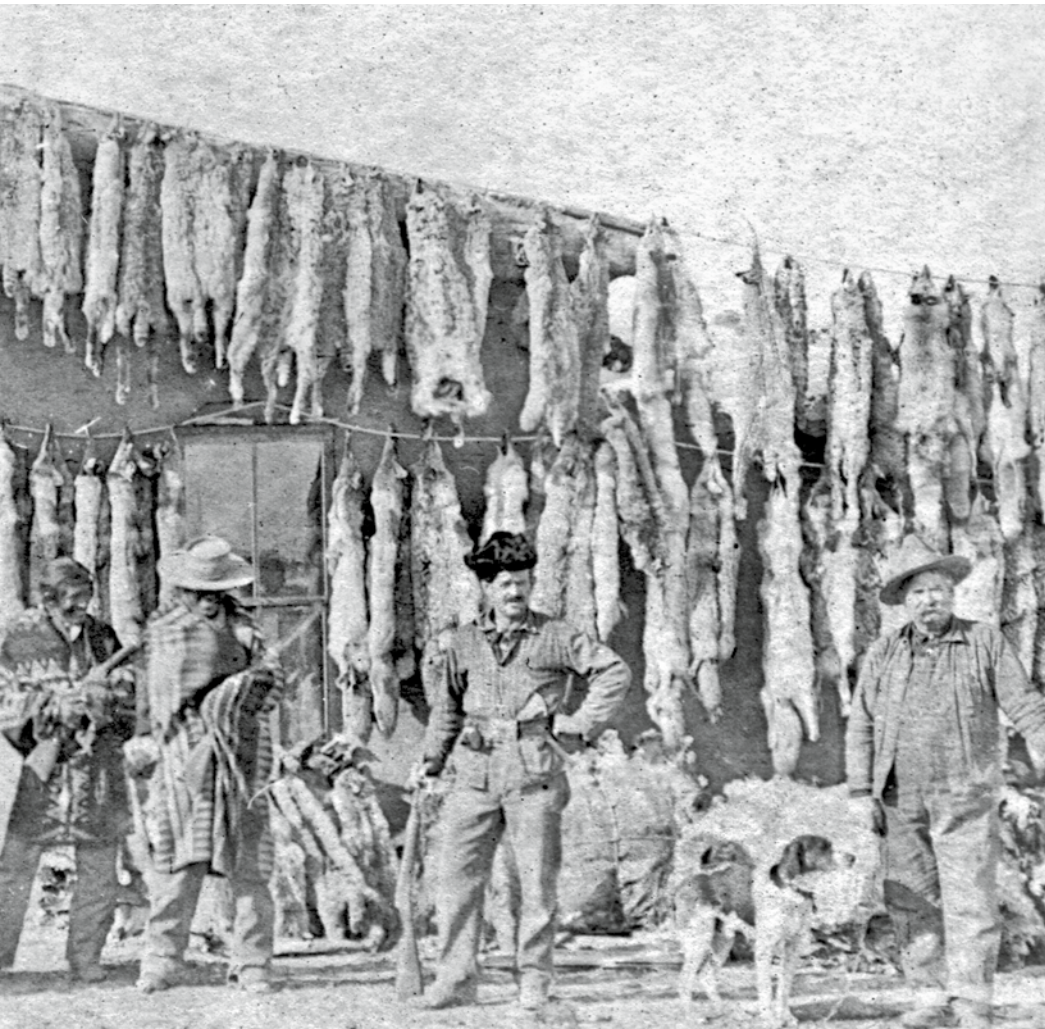
When the United States entered the world war, Mrs. Wetherell saddled her horse, put food and a bedding roll on a pack-mule, and went far into the interior of the reservation, wherever a settlement of Navajos could be found. Most of them had never heard of the war. She told them of the government's need for their help, till she aroused them from indifference to a patriotism the more touching because as a race they had little reason for gratitude toward a too-paternal government. Out of their flocks they promised each a sheep, —no mean gift at the war price. When the "flu" epidemic interrupted her work, she had already raised $3000 among a people as far from the Hindenburg line, psychologically, as the Eskimos or Patagonians.

—Winifred Hawkridge Dixon, c.1919

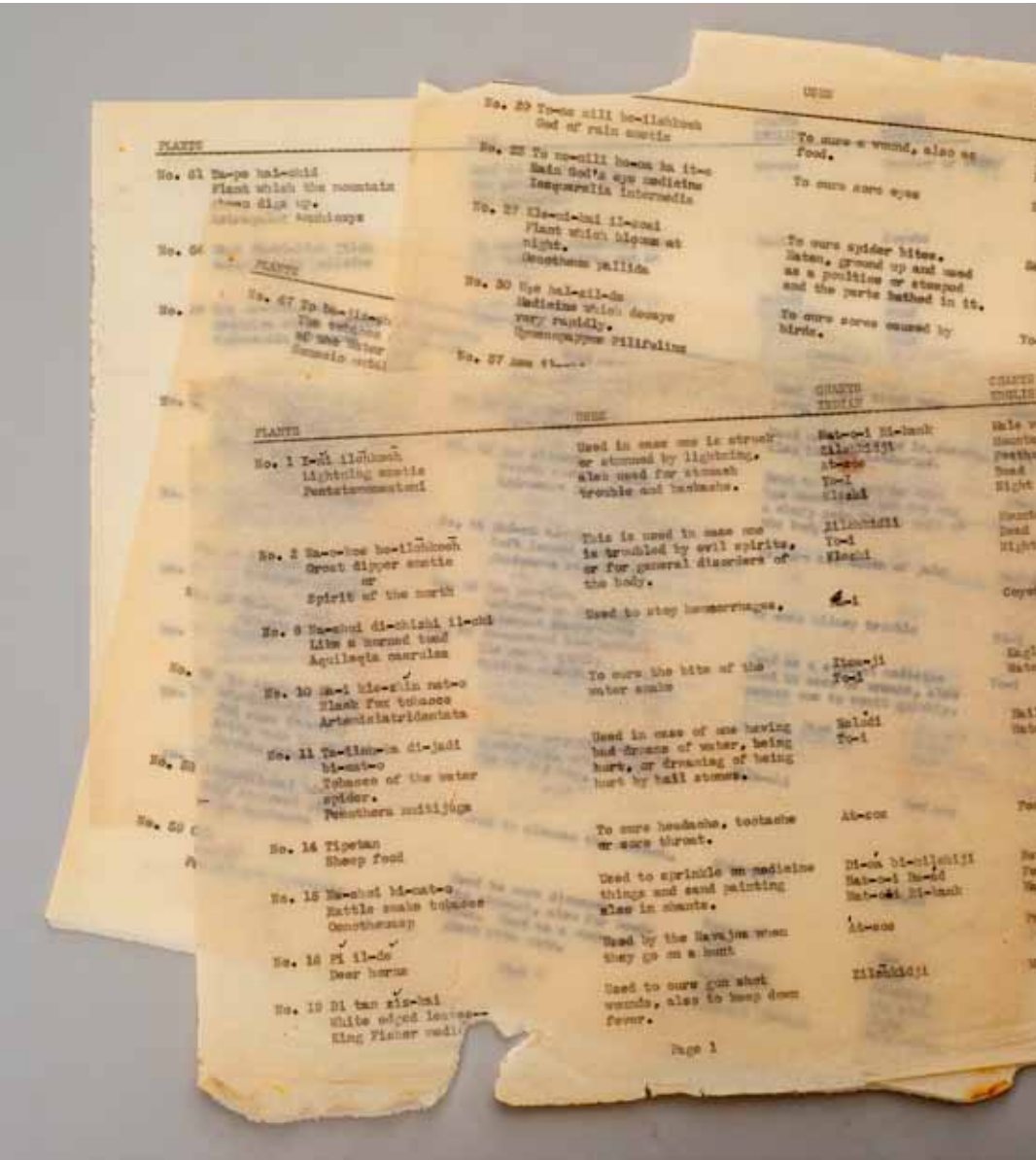
Slim Woman and Sitsosie, who died in the influenca epidemic, 1918

Mrs. Wetherill appears to have the entire confidence of a large number of Navajo, and to be very highly esteemed by them. They call her something that sounds like 'Sans Souci', meaning 'Slim Woman'. She speaks Navajo as fluently as English and is constantly joking with the Indians, many of whom feel quite free to come into the house and even sit about there. Last winter she undertook to collect from the Indians for the Red Cross and, accompanied only by a Navajo, made a three weeks' trip among the camp Indians and collected 500 sheep which, at $4.00 a head in the present market, represent a tidy sum.

—George C. Fraser, 1919



Mrs. Wetherill, living as she does in the desert without social contact with women of her station except such as come as her guests, is a marvel of the desert, working diligently all the time, studying the flora of the Reservation, collecting and mounting specimens labeled with the botanical names, local names and the uses made of them by the medicine men of the Indians.


PLANTS
USE
No. 1
No. 2
No. 3
No. 10
No. 11
No. 14 Tibetan Sheep food
No. 16 Deer horns
No. 19
No. 29
No. 27
No. 30
To cure a wound, also as food.
To cure sore eyes
To cure spider bites.
To cure sores caused by birds.
Used in case one is struck or stunned by lightning, also used for stomach trouble and backache.
This is used in case one is troubled by evil spirits, or for general disorders of the body.
Used to stop hemorrhages.
To cure the bite of the water snake
Used in case of one having had dreams of water, being hurt, or dreaming of being hurt by tall stones.
To cure headache, toothache or sore throat.
Used to sprinkle on medicine things and sand painting also in chants.
Used by the Navajos when they go on a hunt
Used to cure gun shot wounds, also to keep down fever.
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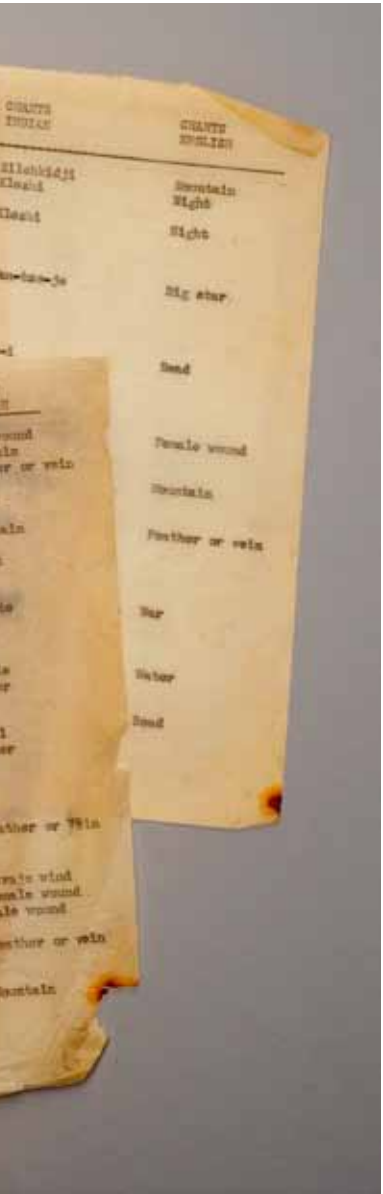
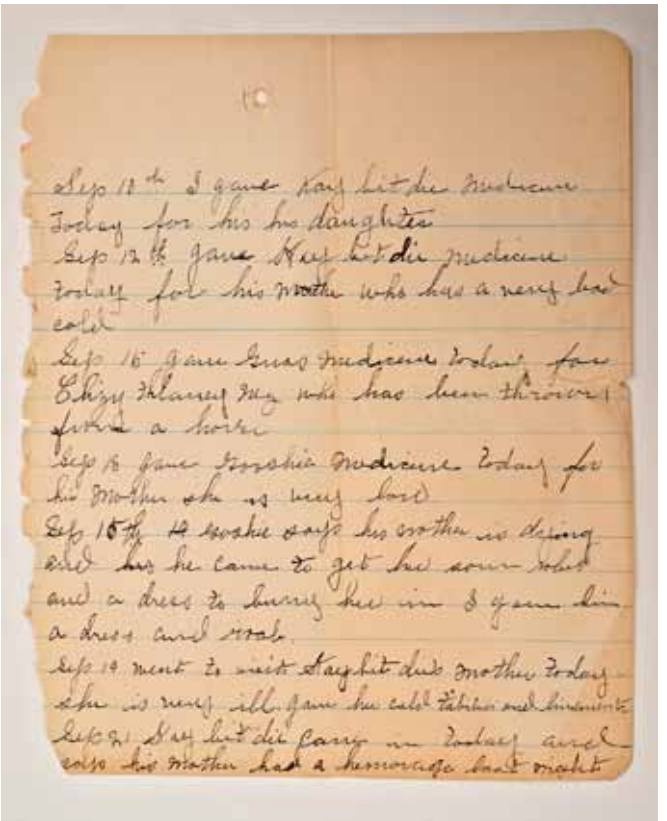
Not a small part of her duties is the part she is forced to play in the lives of her Indian friends, she being their judge and jury, settling their disputes with feminine tact and judicial judgment, the fairness of which is recognized by the Indians, and they do not hesitate to call on her and accept her decisions as law....

—W.D. Sayle, c.1919



I wish you were here in this charming little home with me and surrounded by its interesting, obliging, kindly, and highly educated owners and friends. You would do as I do, shake hands with the Indians, women and men coming in all the time to get Mrs. Wetherill's advice and wise and kind words and greet their trusting demeanor with a 'how', their greeting. They come to her with all their troubles, physical and mental, and it is deeply touching how consoled and relieved they walk out, mostly all handsome, tall, powerful, nature folk.



Sept 12th I gave Kay Lit the medicine
Today for his two daughters
Sept 12th gave Kay Lit the medicine
today for his mother who has a very bad
cold
Sept 16 I gave Grey medicine today for
Ethel Blaney Jay who has been thrown
from a horse
Sept 18 gave Tsosie medicine today for
his mother she is very sick
Sept 18th Mr Wake says his mother is dying
also has he came to get her some robes
and a dress to bury her in I gave him
a dress and robe
Sept 19 went to visit daughter dick mother today
she is very ill gave her cold tablets and liniment
Sept 21 Kay Lit the Carry in today and
says his mother had a hemorrage last night

I saw their sick treated; I saw their differences and disputes arbitrated; I saw their marital troubles adjusted; and I heard of how Mrs. Wetherill travelled repeatedly to the Arizona State Prison as far as Phoenix, a great 300 miles distance to get out a 'life term' Navaho

who had shot another Indian for using his ponies and leaving them to shift for themselves when not needed. I saw the Indians trading their wool and blankets for flour and supplies; I saw them begging for credit; I saw them in their hogan home, thoughtful and joyful and always content when the Wetherills were around, for they know them to be real friends. Before their arrival in this part of the big desert there were many atrocities on white man if alone or taken unawares; but now there are none. The Wetherills always go unarmed.

The pleasure of a visit at Kayenta is enhanced by the opportunity for conversation with Mrs. Wetherill whose knowledge of the Indians in the Southwest, especially the Navajo, Piute, and Hopi, their language, customs, ceremonies, and traditions, is not equalled by any other white person. Unfortunately, her writings have not been published because of the lack of outside support which is essential, and they are likely to perish with her unless someone comes along with the necessary understanding and ability to supply the missing link in this chain.

Mrs. Wetherill has collected more than three hundred varieties of desert plants which have been identified by the University of Arizona and the New York Botanical Garden. She has worked among the natives for many years. She has won their complete confidence, I might even say their love and affection, and has thus been enabled to learn from them the Indian names and medicinal uses of all these plants, and the ceremonies accompanying their administration, as well as the chants sung while these medicines are being compounded. What an opportunity for the advancement of general knowledge and perhaps even medical science, if only someone would wake up to the value of the treasures here collected, someone who would be sufficiently interested to go there, or send a dependable representative to investigate and report his findings.

—Charles L. Bernheimer, 1920

The designs used in these ceremonies vary greatly and some fifty or more have been collected by Mrs. John Wetherill, a life-long friend of the Navajo and a resident on the Navajo reservation for many years. In the Arizona State Museum are six original paintings made by Sam Chief, one of the wisest and most artistic medicine men that the Navajos have ever had, and nine reproduced in water colors by Clyde A. Colville from original drawings in crayon done by the same old gifted medicine man, Sam Chief. It was through the friendship and influence of Mrs. John Wetherill that Sam Chief was persuaded to leave these six original paintings intact. They are a rare treasure and represent Sam Chief's blessing upon the campus and the students, a blessing as real, as sincere and as efficacious as any prayers ever offered in behalf of the institution.

—Byron Cummings, c.1920

Slim Woman, Sam Chief, and his family

...I summarize the ideas of Mrs. John Wetherill, to whose home, 157 miles from the railroad in the Navajo reservation, many famous people have gone. The ancient world and the American present meet in her personality as perhaps in no other personality alive. She has always been among Indians and for twenty-three years has lived among the Navajos. Going immemorial ways in her scholarship, she is a trader's wife and a never-resting social worker among a people who have taken her completely to themselves....

The most practical individual working among Indians today is Mrs. John C. Wetherill. She lives at Kayenta, which is the post office furthest from the railroad of any in the United States. She has been twenty-three years continually among the Navajos and nearly all her life among the Southwest Indians. She is a trader's wife, and John Wetherill, her husband, a famous guide, has also lived from

Slim Woman and Hoskininni Begay at Santa Barbara, CA, gathering ceremonial materials, 1923

childhood among the Indians. Mrs. Wetherill, speaking the Navajo language and experiencing alternately the Navajo's mode of living and the white man's, has gone quite profoundly into the cultural and anthropological way of her neighbors. No one knows so well as she the simple yet enormous things possible for and with the Navajos....

Mrs. Wetherill enthused Theodore Roosevelt about this vision ten years ago. There is nothing astonishing in the idea save the fact that the woman who has thought of it is likewise the person with the most detailed and penetrating vision of the esthetic and mystic life of the Navajo.

—John Collier, 1923

We rested several days at Kayenta, where I watched the Navajos with ever-growing pity and talked endlessly with the Wetherills. Mrs. Wetherill, whose Indian name was Austhon Sosie, knew more of the Navajos than any other white person. She had lived all her life among them. It was to be my good fortune to give to the world of readers much of her knowledge.

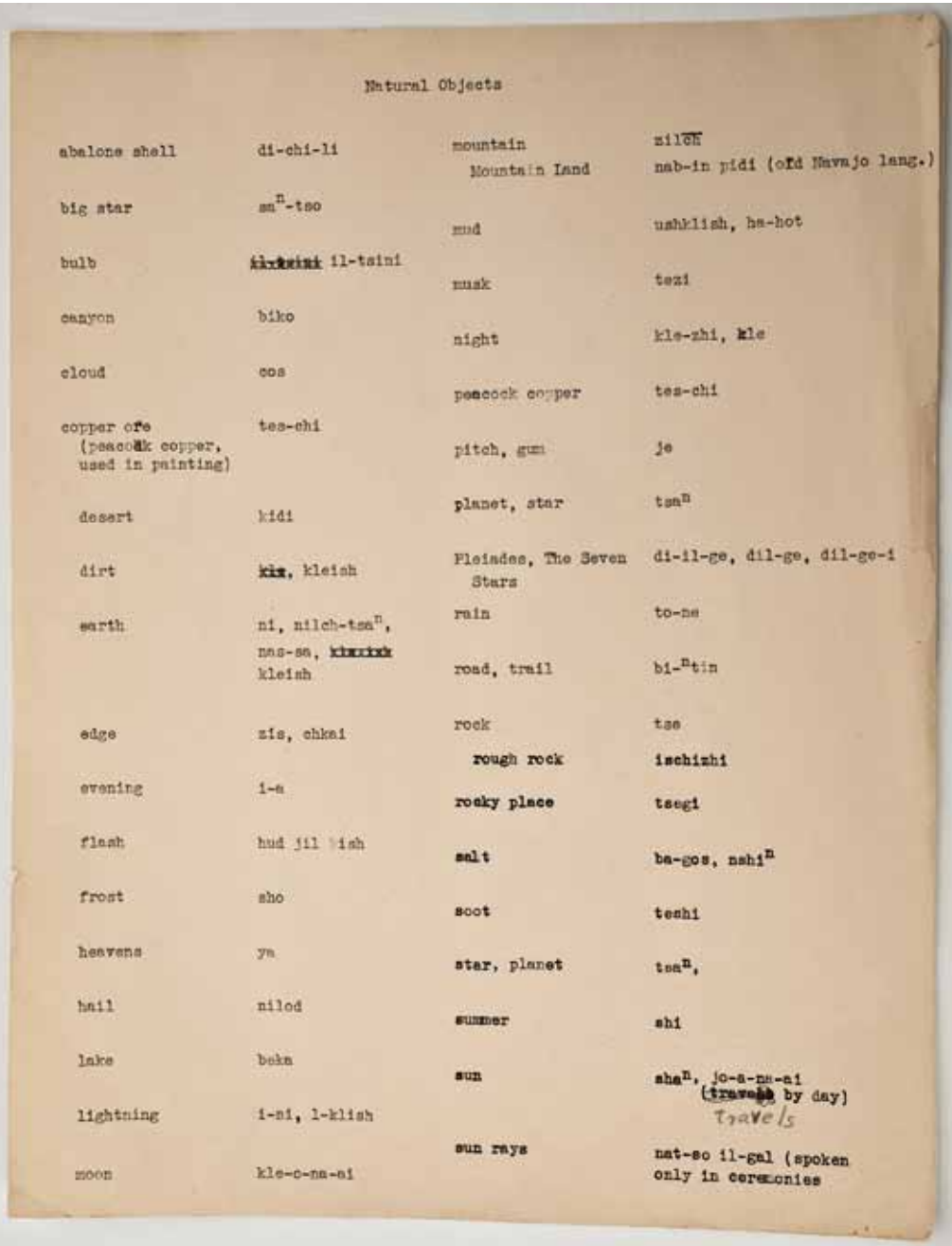
—Zane Grey, 1923

...between two Navajos, an old man and a youth, with whom she is engaged in earnest conversation, sits Mrs. Wetherill, whom the Navajo for twenty years have called Astan Zoche (the little slender woman), although she seems neither little nor slender, as she leans forward in her chair, while succulent aboriginal phrases roll from her lips not less easily than from those of her auditors. She cannot seem slender now, since she is quite frankly plump; and she does not seem little, because those snapping black eyes, that definite jaw, which occasionally clicks shut, and the vivacity of her gestures suggest so much power, so much vital energy, that her relative physical size is obscured at first by the suggestions of power in specific characteristics. She wears a street-garb which might be worn by any American woman of middle age, and her straight jet hair is dressed after the manner of Los Angeles; but her face belies equally the daughter of the town or of the provincial farm, for not even her indubitable inheritance from Irish progenitors—the flash of the eye and the quick smile or determined pursing of the lips—can entirely obscure the lines which loneliness and longing have graven deep in her brow and in the furrows drooping from the corners of her mouth. The desert chasteneth whom it loveth.

...We had many long talks with Mrs. Wetherill about the Navajos. She has spent thirty years among them and is one of the few of our race and the only white woman to be adopted into their tribe, being an honored member of the aristocratic Tol-chini clan. Every Navajo on the reservation knows of Astan Zoche (the little slender woman, although Mrs. Wetherill is no longer slender); they have learned that Mrs. Wetherill is their true friend, and they come great distances to seek her aid or advice, and her word is virtually law among them. It was most extraordinary to see them enter her house (the door is always open), come and shake hands with her, and sit by the fire to talk or just to listen.

If you hear Mrs. Wetherill talking with several Navajos you cannot distinguish her accent; she is one of few persons who really speak their language....

—Clyde Kluckhohn, 1923



Natural Objects

abalone shell	di-chi-li
big star	sa^{n}-tso
bulb	il-tsini
canyon	biko
cloud	cos
copper ore (peacock copper, used in painting)	tes-chi
desert	kidi
dirt	kleish
earth	ni, nilch-tsa^{n}, nas-sa, kleish
edge	zis, chkai
evening	i-a
flash	hud jil lish
frost	sho
heavens	ya
hail	nilod
lake	beka
lightning	i-ni, l-klish
moon	kle-c-na-ai
mountain	nilch
Mountain Land	nab-in pidi (old Navajo lang.)
mud	ushklish, ha-hot
musk	tezi
night	kle-zhi, kle
peacock copper	tes-chi
pitch, gum	je
planet, star	tsa^{n}
Pleiades, The Seven Stars	di-il-ge, dil-ge, dil-ge-i
rain	to-ne
road, trail	bi-^{n}tin
rock	tse
rough rock	ischizhi
rocky place	tsegi
salt	ba-gos, $nashi^{n}$
soot	teshi
star, planet	tsa^{n},
summer	shi
sun	sha^{n}, jo-a-na-ai (travels by day) Travels
sun rays	nat-so il-gal (spoken only in ceremonies

When the first council of the Navajos met, in 1923, there was a long delay in getting started. Many of the Navajos, they said, would not enter the meeting until a certain white woman came. Government officials, Indian agents, important gentlemen from Washington fretted about it, but nothing could be done. When an Indian is not ready to move, he will not move, and that's that. Washington has had to wait before and since, until the Indian thinks that the moment has come. When the white woman came, they said they could begin. She was Mrs. John Wetherill, of Kayenta, Ariz., wife of an Indian trader at the post farthest from the railroad....

—Erna Fergusson, 1923

Slim Woman, 1923

[The Navajos] have a religious system that is very beautiful, philosophical, and ethical, and shows undeniable evidence of an occult background, according to Mrs. John Wetherall, the only white woman ever to have been admitted into the Clan.

'The Navajos are in many respects like all other people,' she said. 'Some are religious and some are careless, but if one of them comes to the place where he doubts the existence of the Great Spirit or God—call Him what you will—and refuses to pray, he is driven from the clan. This is a terrible calamity for he may starve to death if he does not die of exposure and loneliness.'

There is no greater authority on the Navajos, and there never has been a greater one, than Mrs. Wetherall, who a few years ago attracted the attention of the world by being late at a council between the Navajos and representatives of oil companies who wanted to lease oil land on the reservation. She had been sent for on this occasion, but had had some difficulty with the horses of her train back in the mountains, and was a day late in arriving. Fifteen hundred Indians and the oil men waited until she got there. One of the men who has worked with her for many years says that in all their councils she acts as judge, and that her decisions are unquestionably accepted and acted upon.

Mrs. Wetherall speaks the Navajo language like one born in the tribe, and it is because of their friendship for her and their willingness to talk with "Asthon Sosie, the Slender One, " as they named her when she was a girl, that much of the truth about them is being learned by the white men. They say themselves, that all their trouble with the white man has come through misunderstanding, and their 'medicine men' (as they call their wise men and healers) for years now have been explaining to her sympathetic mind the significance of their ceremonies, their folk-lore, and the medicinal value of plants....

Mrs. Wetherall told about an ancient medicine man who explained to her many of the secrets of healing with herbs. He explained that

his knowledge was not really a secret one, but was a science and required many years of study. He told her how his grandfather would take him as a little lad out in the fields with him while he watched the sheep, and would make him study plants. Every day there were new plants to be learned, their names, properties and where they could be found. Then when they returned to their home at night sometimes the old man would keep him awake until nearly morning cramming him with lessons. This continued for years and until the lad knew all it was possible for him to learn about tribal medicine.

'Can we honestly say that this man was ignorant? Was he not in a sense as well educated as our doctors? And by the way, the Indian medicine men are generally specialists, too, and the Indian with many aches has to pay the same round of visits to the specialists as his white brothers do.'

—Helen R. Crane, 1928

John Yazzie and Wolfkiller

Pioneering is still going on in the outlying country in the Southwest, and the women continue to play a prominent part in it. Mrs. John Wetherill, with her husband and associates, has for many years conducted a trading post for the Navajo Indians at Kayenta, Arizona. She probably speaks the Navajo language better and knows more of the Navajo temperament than any other white person in America. In her long dealings with these Bedouins of the Painted

Deserts she has shown such wisdom and sympathetic fairness that the tribesmen now look upon her as a great chief—a woman judge. They come to her for advice; they ask her to adjudicate differences among themselves and to adjust quarrels. And they abide by her decisions.

—Will H. Robinson, 1928

It is hard to put the finger upon the essential qualities in Navajo character. The person whose opinion I on the whole respect the most is that of Mrs. Wetherill. She is unfortunately not scientifically trained, but she has lived among the Navajoes for nearly forty years and brings to the understanding of her experiences a sharp vigorous mind and a truly scientific curiosity and passion for accuracy. Her knowledge of the language is excelled from the technical point of view by Professor Sapir whose specialty is the languages of the Athabascan group, but from a point of view of the language as a means of direct communication with the people, only her own two children surpass her. This knowledge of the language and daily experience with the Indians in such a variety of situations give her an enormous advantage over even the trained ethnologist who works through an interpreter and who spends a limited time in the field.

I am deeply suspicious of the results of researches conducted entirely in the trading store or in the government school, especially through the medium of interpreters. Scientific methods and scientific ways of recording sounds are all very well, and very important. But my own slight experience has shown me that the Indian will often tell a questioner anything to get rid of him. Even an honest and intelligent interpreter is often baffled by differences in thought forms which defy translation or by concepts which are beyond him. The scientist's direct observations of detail must be accepted and even what he has learned indirectly must be considered with respect, but in generalizations about Navajo nature I shall give complete credence only to the dirt ethnologist who has lived in the hogans and who speaks the language. Otherwise I take the word of Mrs. Wetherill who has won their friendship and confidence. Her vigilant common sense and her minute observation of Navajo character over so long a period of time are, it seems to me, just as useful securities against deception as are the special tools of the scientist.

But I find it difficult to accept even Mrs. Wetherill's generalization

when she says 'the Navajoes are just like other folks.' That is better than 'the ignorant savage' of the worst element in the Indian service and better than 'the noble redman' of the worst sentimentalists; but still, I feel, the Navajoes have a way of their own and a very special way. Mrs. Wetherill is of course right when she insists that generalizations about such large groups of people are dangerous—that there are many variations in character, some purely individual, some only influenced by locality and by mixtures of peoples. I think perhaps one would get close to it if one said that the Navajo was like a charming but slightly spoiled child who had a strangely strong and powerful love of beauty which one doesn't usually associate with children...

—Clyde Kluckhohn, 1928

Like all pioneer mothers of that day, Mrs. Wetherill had to serve both as nurse and as family doctor on many occasions, and she soon had a wide reputation among the Indians, which was enhanced by her rapid acquirement of the Navajo language and its various dialects. Wherever there was sickness, the healing services of the 'Medicine Woman' were sought, with the result that eventually Mrs. Wetherill was formally adopted into the tribe, in which for many years now she has been the object of devoted veneration.

—Robert Frothingham, c.1930

Slim Woman with Fannie and Betty, her adopted daughters

We now shift the scene to Kayenta, some 700 miles from Los Angeles, with the last 100 miles over a desert trail that had been all but obliterated by recent cloudbursts. In the spacious comfort and luxury of the living room at the Wetherill Ranch, the topic soon centered upon Navajo medicines. 'If you're really interested in learning something about it,' said Mrs. Wetherill, 'I'd suggest that you take my medicine chest and go to work. I'll be glad to answer any questions. It took me three years to compile the medicine chest, so it will probably take you several days to get through it.' She tapped a small bell, and an Indian servant appeared. A few words of Navajo jargon were spoken, and the Indian disappeared. He was back in a few minutes lugging a box that resembled a fair-sized packing case. This box is what Mrs. Wetherill terms her medicine chest. It is in reality a filing cabinet containing more than 300 Navajo prescriptions, samples of the various plants used as medicines, with accompanying data in English, Navajo, and Latin....

—John Edwin Hogg, 1931

Slim Woman with her medicine chest

Mrs. Wetherill, possibly because she lived closer to the Indians while her husband ran cattle, is the one who knows the Navajos. They say she speaks their language better than she does English. Navajos look to her as to their best friend. Mrs. Wetherill moves quietly, but her eyes flash like lightning, seeing everything, understanding everything. Her voice can be deep and smooth, or deep enough to scare a malefactor to death. She is a force, that woman. She has lived widely, deeply, and well. Out of simple living on ranches and at remote trading posts she has accumulated such riches that a marked trail has been beaten to her door by everyone who would understand Navajos. One of those rare people who achieve true culture out of what is at hand, she learned Navajo because she needed it. She learned legends, customs, beliefs and manners as one learns from daily association. She had to understand Indian medication because often there was no other. It was only when students began to come to her for help that Louisa Wetherill realized that she had a priceless record, valuable for all time. So she began to write down what she knew and to collect sand-paintings and songs. Her material accumulated for years before Frances Gillmor undertook to put it into shape for publication. Her book may prove to be most valuable as an introduction. She has told the life of the Wetherills and she has cleverly incorporated much data from Mrs. Wetherill's collection. But not all. There is still a store of knowledge there which must some day be made available.

—Erna Fergusson, c.1934

The back cover of the original *Traders to the Navajos*

A tribal endorsement of 'Traders to the Navajos' together with a few of the thumb-print signatures, and names of the signers.

We, the undersigned, members of the Navajo tribe, have known Asthon Sosi, Louisa (Mrs. John) Wetherill, for a great many years. We believe that there is no other living white woman who has as complete knowledge of our people, their customs and traditions, as she, and we have full confidence that she will not say or publish anything about our people but what are facts and truth.

Ushclishnie So — Big Mud
Clee do yohenie — Didn't see the horses
Kay Yoethnie — Lost his shoe
Hatalie Detonie — Thick Chanter
Bitsee Gal clichee Beyaz — Red band around her hair's son
Bedaytean Beyaz — Four horned sheep's son
Clizie do enanie — The one who won't eat goat
Uskan etso — Big Yucca fruit
Nea decloie — Fuzzy face
Uschlishnie — Mud
Joh nez holonie — The man who has mules
Bego eskish — Gap between his teeth
Utenie — Doer of deeds
Glizie detolthie — Kicked by a goat
Ushinie Elsesie — Little Salt
Dogie Begay — Mustache's son
Huskie — Angry one
Neskahie yazzie — Little Fat
Adakie Yazzie — Little Gambler
Ha Goie Begay — Where are you going's son
Dedetso Holonie — Has peaches
Kitseelie — Broken pottery
Dogi sacod — Scattered whiskers
Awalia — The man who went to jail
Toh Descheene — Bitter water
Senillie Begay — Son of the man who looked like a bunch of rags thrown down
Tse Nastuie — Wild cat hair
Clissie Bedogie — Goat whiskers
Toh ba distaze — He slept by the water

She is a woman to cope with; a woman to have with you in the frontier life.... You could live in the desert 40 years and still be a tenderfoot beside Mrs. John Wetherill.

—Ernie Pyle, 1939

Slim Woman, 1939

Every time I receive a letter asking suggestions for dealing with the Navajo, my memory shifts back through the years to one night when I was warming myself by the great fireplace in the long dining room of the old Wetherill ranch at Kayenta, Arizona.

Softly the authoritative voice of Louisa Wetherill was weaving into my mind an indelible pattern of her lifetime of experience in dealing with the Navajo, which started when she and Hastin John established their trading post in the wild mesa country of Chief Haskenini at Moonwater, Utah, in 1906.

"At times, wasn't it lonesome and dangerous for you folks way up there all alone—with only primitive Navajo for neighbors and 100 miles of trail between you and your nearest white settlement?" I asked when she had finished.

Mrs. Wetherill smiled. She seemed to be deliberating before she answered. "Van, your first year with the Navajo will be one of confusion and wonder. But as time passes you will discover what I have learned in over some 40 years with the People. Treated right the Navajo become humorous, dignified, and loyal friends.

"Of course everything depends on the Navajo reaction to your behavior. As a guest in a land where most white men are regarded with suspicion, always remember that your acceptance by the People will depend upon your ability to accept with dignity, sympathy, and honesty the way of Navajo life."

—Richard Van Valkenburgh, c.1940

The living room at Kayenta

Louisa Wetherill once gave me what I have always regarded as the best formula for dealing with [the Navajos]: "As a guest in a land where most white people are regarded with suspicion, always remember that your acceptance by The People will depend on your ability to accept with dignity, sympathy and honesty the Navajo way of life. Treated right, the Navajos become humorous, dignified and loyal friends."

—Randall Henderson, c.1941

From the time the Wetherills came to the Navajo reservation in 1900, and still more after they pushed on with their freight wagons still farther from settlements in 1906 and Hosteen John held the all-day feast of rabbits and coffee and white bread to convince the Navajos of Oljato that they needed a trading post nearer than ninety

miles away, Louisa Wade Wetherill explored the Navajo hearts as her husband did their country. To the trading post at Oljato and later to Kayenta the outside world came in a steady stream—scientists, writers, artists. Theodore Roosevelt was a guest in the Wetherill home and wrote of it later. But all these people came and went without belonging to Asthon Sosi's Navajo world. It was for the Navajos that the door of her house was kept unlocked, and they came with the soft sure step of friends who knew they were welcome to sit in the comfortable chairs in front of the fireplace. She spoke their language, and was proud that they considered her a member of the Tachini clan....

—Frances Gillmor, 1945

Slim Woman died in Prescott, Arizona, on September 18, 1945, at the age of 68. She was buried in Kayenta.

Writings

Louisa wrote, or contributed to the writing of, the following:

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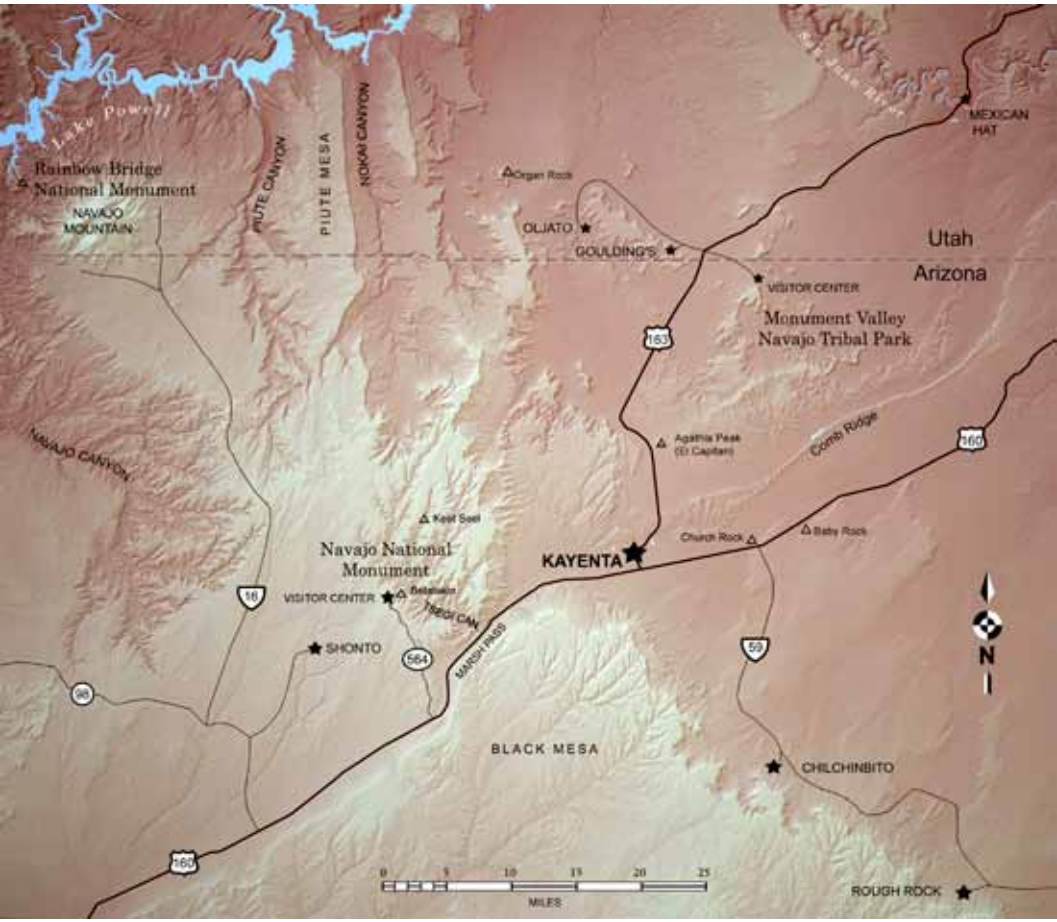
Ward City
1877 (born)-1879
NEVADA
UTAH
ARIZONA

COLORADO
Mancos
1879-1900
Oljato
1906-1910
Kayenta
1910-1945
Ojo Alamo
1900-1904
Chaco Canyon
1905-1906
Chavez
1904-1905
NEW MEXICO


Lake Powell
Rainbow Bridge
National Monument
NAVAJO
MOUNTAIN
PIUTE CANYON
PIUTE MESA
NOKAI CANYON
Organ Rock
OLJATO
GOULDING'S
MEXICAN
HAT
Utah
Arizona
VISITOR CENTER
Monument Valley
Navajo Tribal Park
163
Agathla Peak
(El Capitan)
Comb Ridge
160
NAVAJO CANYON
Kayel Seel
Navajo National
Monument
KAYENTA
Church Rock
Baby Rock
16
VISITOR CENTER
Betatakin
TSEGI CAN
SHONTO
564
MARSH PASS
59
N
98
BLACK MESA
CHILCHINBITO
160
0 5 10 15 20 25
MILES
ROUGH ROCK

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